

Ecology in Judaism

By Eleanor Weinglass
Director, Hebrew Academy

The combining of Judaica and secular subjects is known as integration, and we do this at the Hebrew Academy when the subject matter is conducive and appropriate to cross-study. We like children to see that their life need not be separated into two separate areas, but that both make a contribution to the wholeness of the individual, and that secular information also has Judaic reference and concerns.

Ecology is a particularly appropriate subject to handle in this manner. Children have been learning about animals and plant life as a part of their science studies. The Judaic area has been looking at ecology from a different angle, the value our traditions place on the world around us.

Third and fourth graders have been learning about the various laws for taking care of trees and the land. They have studied commentaries from different periods of time about the law which forbids cutting down trees in war, and they have discussed reasons why people would want to destroy trees. They have considered how people can prevent destruction of the environment.

Children studied the laws

that stress the importance of taking care of the land and its products, such as the law requiring that the land rest after six years of use. In learning about the obligation land owners have to leave a section of their produce for the poor. The pupils learned how giving Tzedakah is also a way of taking care of nature, and that helping people is a way of helping G-d's creation.

The students investigated the saying that compares a person to a "tree of the field." Their analysis, in short, is as follows: Just as a seed has the potential to become a tree, so each human has potential for development. As the tree needs water and food, we need knowledge and Torah. As the tree has roots, we have roots that connect us; our leaves are the deeds we perform. Children then summed up their study by writing an eleventh commandment about ecological responsibility. Their commandments include the following:

Don't be mad or angry at nature because it gives you life.

Don't destroy nature because it's G-d's beautiful work.

Don't take what you want. Wanton destruction is not allowed.

Humanities, Education Are Enhanced At Jewish Day School

By Saul Brenner

Recently the National Endowment for the Humanities reported that many college graduates lack "even the most rudimentary knowledge about the history, literature, art, and philosophical foundations of their nation and civilization."

A 42-page report, written by William J. Bennett, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, urged that the colleges teach:

1. An understanding of the origin and development of Western civilization from its roots in antiquity to the present. This understanding should include a grasp of the major trends in society, religion, art, literature and politics.

2. A careful reading of several masterworks of English, American and European literature, as well as the Bible, which is the basis for so much subsequent history, literature and philosophy.

3. An understanding of the most significant ideas and debates in the history of philosophy.

4. Demonstrable proficiency in a foreign language (see Chronicle of Higher Education, November 28, 1984.)

It occurred to me that children who attend Hebrew

day schools may obtain a head-start in achieving some of these goals.

First, the day school children gain some understanding of the religious and cultural roots of Western civilization by studying about the ancient Hebrews. It is admittedly a partial understanding, but one that can be enhanced in later stages of their education.

Second, they are given the opportunity of reading the Bible, one of the masterworks of Western civilization. They read this source in the original Hebrew.

Third, the students in the Hebrew day schools are introduced to some of the philo-

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hebrew
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Havdallah Service

For the second year, the Hebrew Academy children have led a Havdallah service, preceded by a Shabbat Maariv service, at the school. On November 17, children impressed their families with excellent competency in leading and participating in these services.

Visit By Rabbi Rocklin

What do we think of when we think of G-d? What does Judaism teach us about G-d? These important and difficult questions were discussed with the children by Rabbi Richard Rocklin. We appreciate his visit and listening to the children's ideas and Jewish concepts of G-d.

Visit By Rabbi Seigel

Rabbi Robert Seigel has been bringing his computer and his VCR to the Hebrew Academy. Children had the opportunity to learn about blessings, to review the alphabet, to practice grammar, and to learn about Chanukah through these media. The film "Lights" was also shown, both to the children and to the parents at a PTA meeting.

Learning About Taste

A taste dimension was added to the study of plant and animal life cycles. Children were told that they would be eating flowers. Preparing themselves for the not very exciting experience of eating rose petals or dandelions, they experienced instead such culinary pleasures as broccoli, cauliflower, alfalfa sprouts (an example of seedlings), raw spinach (an example of leaves), carrots and turnips (roots), celery (stems), pineapple (fruit). To everyone's surprise, the children thoroughly enjoyed these taste delights.



Havdallah Services at the Academy.

Animal Rights and Jewish Law

Third and fourth graders discussed the rabbinic rules that one should not eat before feeding one's animals and the value of not killing animals needlessly. Joey Lambert and Shara Steiner, third graders, gave meaning to these rules in the following stories.

Monologue of a Pet

By Joey Lambert

One night my Mom was cooking something that smelled good. I asked her, "Mom, what smells so good?" My Mom answered, "Oh, it's stew." "Mmmmmm, my favorite!" I said.

Just then, my Dad came in. "Joey," he said, "have you fed Fluffy yet?" (Fluffy is my cat.) I answered: "No, Dad, not yet." "But I bet you don't know why," he said.

Just then I heard



Geoffrey Gartner and Sloane Muller lead Havdallah.

something. "Joey! Joey!" It seemed to be coming from outside, so I went outside.

"Joey!" My cat was talking to me! "Joey, have you ever thought about the way you weird people are taking care of

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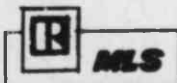
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